Bentham Fabian could turn his hand to many things v03
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Bentham Fabian
could turn his hand to many things

by Francis Howcutt

1 & 2 Pilgrim Hill

The Author

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Introduction

This is an extended version of my article *Bentham Fabian – from Pilgrim Hill to Salt Lake City* which was published by the Norwood Society.[1]

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On 15 June 1838, those present at the London Auction Mart at Bartholomew Lane, facing the east side of the Bank of England, were offered a selection of copyhold and freehold properties in Lower Norwood (now West Norwood) which amounted to about 15 acres and was parcelled out as 31 lots. Although situated only some six miles south of the City of London, most of the land was undeveloped. However, lots 4 and 5 were a pair of villas whose addresses are now 1 and 2 Pilgrim Hill. The auction catalogue described each of the villas in these terms:

> *Recently erected and judiciously planned for the occupation of a respectable Family. The front is in imitation of stone, and commands an uninterrupted View of the beautiful Sheet of Water and Plantation on the opposite side of the Road, and also over the Plantations and Grounds forming the Cemetery behind. The House contains on the First Floor, four comfortable Bedchambers; Ground Floor, an Entrance Hall, Dining Room, with projecting Window, Marble Chimney Piece, and Mahogany-top Cupboards, Breakfast Parlour, and Library; Basement, light Kitchen, Wash-house, Store-room, Pump, and Tank outside. There is a Front Garden enclosed with Park Paling and Gate, and a Yard and Garden behind. Estimated to let when papering is done, at £45 per Annum.*[3]

The uninterrupted views at the front of the houses, either or both of which were generally referred to during the 19th century as Evesham Villa, disappeared in the 1850s with the advent of the railway viaduct south east of West Norwood station. Whether Bentham Fabian – one of the earliest residents - was 'respectable' is something for the reader to decide.

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[1] *Norwood Review*, No.228, Spring 2020, pages 10-14.
[2] https://web.archive.org/
[3] Lambeth Archives: C74.

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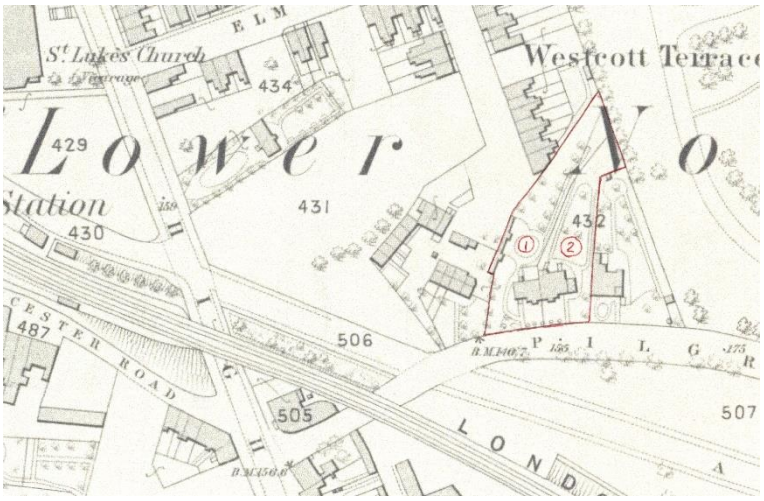
The 14 April 1843 edition of *Perry's Bankrupt & Insolvent Gazette* included in its lists of insolvents Bentham Fabian of Evesham Villa, Norwood, who at that stage was out of business and languishing in Queen's prison, which stood in Southwark north of the junction of Borough Road and the road that is now named Newington Causeway.



1 & 2 Pilgrim Hill outlined and numbered in red

Distinctive names can be very helpful when investigating the story of a footloose individual. Bentham Fabian is such a person, more of whose story emerges from numerous newspaper reports as well as the other works cited. His birth and christening are recorded in the register of Ebenezer chapel, Clover Street at Chatham as Bentham son of Charles Montague Fabian and Mary his wife, born at Rainham, Kent on 16 July 1820 and baptised on 8 September of the same year. The will of his father, a captain in the Royal Navy, was proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury on 5 February 1827 leaving all to his wife.[4] By the time of the 1841 census, Mary Fabian was living in part of a house at Gower Place, Marylebone along with her daughter Mary and sons Bentham and Robert. Bentham was then working as a clerk. At the time of his marriage at St Pancras New church to Esther Mary Hutchinson on 20 February 1843, Bentham's residence was recorded as St Pancras and his occupation as 'colonial agent'.

Bentham and Esther's daughter Catherine Margaret Irene was born on 21 November 1843 at Hackney and baptised in January 1844 at Stoke Newington, her father claiming to be a gentleman residing in that area.

Despite his financial difficulties in 1843, two years later Bentham Fabian was back in business. The Post Office London directory for 1845 lists him as a colonial & commercial agent in partnership with Richard Henry Smyth at the Hall of Commerce in Threadneedle Street.

But all was not well. In July 1846, John Bannister Faulkner and Bentham Fabian were accused of uttering forged papers purporting to be Buckinghamshire Railway scrip but released on bails from themselves and sureties totalling £650 each. They had evidently traded in a substantial way, as when arrested Faulkner had £1,025 in his pockets and Fabian held bills due for £5,693.12.10d. Scrip shares for an assortment of railway companies were also found in their possession. Faulkner was acquitted at the Central Criminal Court in September of that year. Bentham did not attend court and his bail was forfeited. It has not been possible to discover the final outcome of the case, but these difficulties may well have prompted Bentham's departure overseas.

[4] The National Archives: https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D163203

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In 1849, Bentham Fabian gave his address as 39 Water Street, New York when placing a series of advertisements whose heading began as 'European agency for the recovery of dormant and improperly withheld real and personal estate' They warned readers about the activities of unscrupulous men who exploited 'the numerous claims for property which citizens of the United States really have, or imagine they possess in England and elsewhere' and then described the services that Bentham offered to such customers. These included trans-Atlantic patent agency and providing 'introductions to men of wealth and respectability'. He claimed to have 'an experience of half a century' in the settlement of debts (at that juncture Bentham was only 28 years old). A list of referees included a Judge and the President of Patchin Bank, Buffalo. The advertisements commenced in July 1848 in a newspaper published at Augusta, Georgia.[5] In October 1848, the same advertisement was available to readers at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.[6] In 1848 or 1849, Bentham gave his address as 38 Broadway when he signed a 'Petition for Cheap Postage'.[7]

He has not been found either in the United States census of 1 June 1850 or the one in England & Wales on 31 March 1851. The reason for this may be that he was in another country on each occasion. One of the vessels that arrived in New York on 3 January 1852 was the steam ship Falcon with passengers including 'B Fabian', recorded as a 36-year-old mechanic 'belonging' to England and intending to settle in the United States. He had not travelled from England, as the only places at which passengers had been taken on board were Chagres and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Chagres was a port on the Isthmus of Panama which after the discovery of gold in California enjoyed a substantial but short-lived boom by catering for prospectors heading west.[8]

Chagres in 1875[9]

[5] *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel*, 8 July 1848, page 3, column 3.
https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn82015215/1848-07-08/ed-1/seq-3/#words=BENTHAM+FABIAN
[6] *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette*, 11 October 1848, page 4, column 6.
https://panewsarchive.psu.edu/lccn/sn85054514/1848-10-11/ed-1/seq-4/
[7] *Petition of Isaac Brow and others to U.S. Congress.* [1848-01-01 - 1849-12-31]. /documents/D273647. The Papers of Abraham Lincoln Digital Library.
https://papersofabrahamlincoln.org/documents/D273647
[8] https://www.immigrantships.net/v18/1800v18/falcon18520103.html
[9] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chagres,_Panam%C3%A1_1875.jpg

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Bentham was still in New York in August 1852 when he wrote a glowing introduction to a book titled *Australia* which offered 'a complete hand-book or guide to the gold regions'.[10] Bentham described himself as the editor, admitting that much of the material, which runs to over 100 pages, came from others. He did not claim to have visited Australia in person.

The Booth Association was established in America, inviting subscriptions to fund the collection of information about the Booth family in America and England and investigate their claims to property in England. A report published by the Association includes the text of a letter that Bentham Fabian wrote from London to its representative on 21 February 1854. In it, he set out his discoveries about people with the Booth surname and indicated that more investigations would be needed. The letter does not mention how much Bentham was charging for his services.[11]

The New York state census of June 1855 records Bentham as a merchant living with his wife Esther and their 7-year-old daughter Esther M H Fabian along with a servant in part of a house at the 4th ward of Brooklyn. It appears that he had recently been in England, as in July of the same year Arthur Wellesley Yarrow obtained judgement at the Kings Bench against Bentham Fabian, secretary of the Army Reform Association, of Spring Gardens, to recover £31.12s.6d due for a loan and wages.[12] The debts had been incurred in March and April. The court granted 'speedy execution' of the judgement, but as Bentham had returned to America before the hearing took place it is unlikely that payment was ever enforced.

The United States census taken in July 1860 records 'Benton Fabe', a merchant with personal estate worth $1,000 living with both Esthers, a servant and also a 3-year-old boy whose name was written as 'Bentham Fabe'. The family's home was at North Bergen, New Jersey, just across the Hudson River from Manhattan.

By 1861, Bentham had moved to Louisiana where he was listed as an agent at 67 Tchoupitoulas Street in the 1861 edition of Gardner's business directory of New Orleans.

In October 1863, he was to be found at Washington DC where he had been appointed in the recently-erected Treasury Department as an additional clerk in its loan and treasury note branch.[13] Bentham evidently did not feel his salary of $1,200 was sufficient, as in November 1865 he was in trouble again. The *New York Times* reported that he had formerly been a clerk in the Treasury Department and, along with William Chase Barney, a clerk in the Custom-house, appeared before Justice Dowling accused of executing three spurious bonds in order to withdraw from the Custom-house three hundred barrels of bonded whisky, the duty on which amounted to $40,000. After much litigation, it was determined that the courts did not have authority to punish the defendants for their actions.[14]

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[10] *Australia … A Complete Hand-Book or Guide to the Gold Regions* by Bentham Fabian. New York, 1852. https://archive.org/details/australiabeingbr00fabi/page/n8

[11] *Report of The Booth Association of the United States* by Columbus Smith, Burlington 1868, page 14. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1b/Report_of_the_Booth_Association_of_the_United_States_%28IA_reportofboothass00smit%29.pdf

[12] *Reading Mercury*, 14 July 1885, page 3, column 5.

[13] *Register of Officers and Agents …. In the Service of the United States on 30 September 1863* by Government Printing Office, Washington DC, 1864, page 19.

[14] *United States v Barney et al. – court report* by Hon. Samuel Blatchford, 1866. https://law.resource.org/pub/us/case/reporter/F.Cas/0024.f.cas/0024.f.cas.1011.2.html

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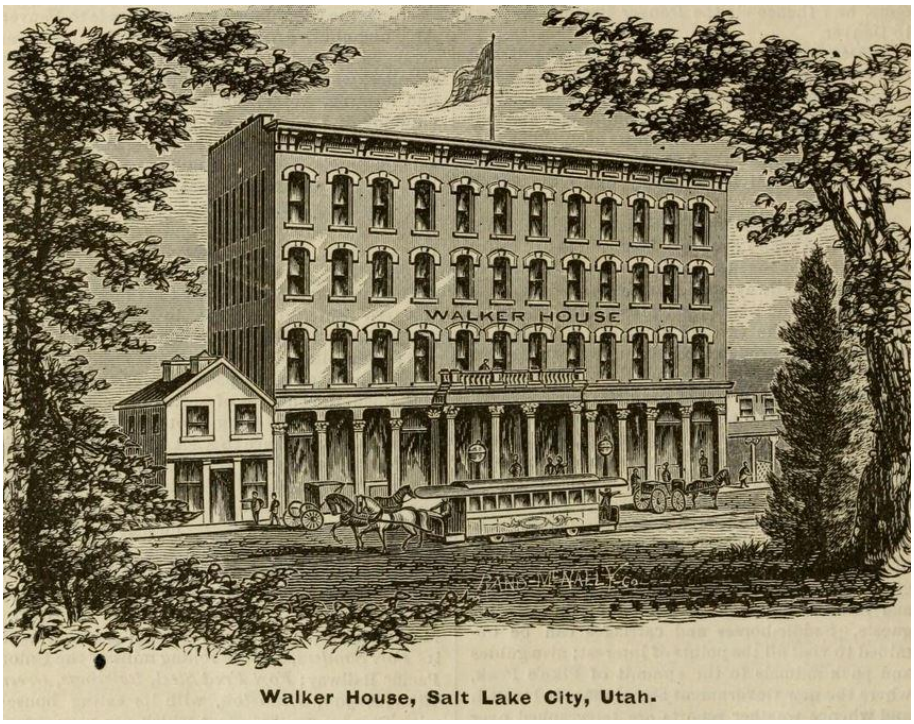
US Treasury building under construction, 1859[15]

In April 1868, Bentham was involved in establishing a Labor Exchange in San Francisco. He also wrote a book published in 1869 with the self-explanatory title *The agricultural lands of California. A guide to the immigrant as to productions, climate and soil in every county in the state*.

Bentham has not been identified in the 1870 US census but by the early 1870s had made his way to Salt Lake City, which had been founded in 1847. An indication of the rapid scale of change during its first few decades can be seen in the contrast between Walker House, a hotel in East Temple Street which was built in 1872, and the wooden structure next door.[16]



Walker House, Salt Lake City, Utah.

[15] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Construction_of_the_United_States_Treasury_Building,_Washington,_D.C.,_showing_construction_of_the_front_steps.tif?page=1

[16] *The North and West Illustrated* by W H Stennett, 1876, page 34.
https://archive.org/details/northwestillustr1876chic/page/34/mode/2up

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In Bentham's day, Utah was not a state but a territory where much power was in the hands of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints under the supervision of Brigham Young. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it does not appear that Fabian was ever converted to that persuasion. John Shanks Lindsay (1840-1906), a noted actor with the Salt Lake Theater, recalled that 'Fabian was widely and favourably known for certain peculiarities. He was extremely fond of the theatre, and every actor was his friend. He was one of those versatile fellows that could turn his hand to many things.'[17] He established The Salt Lake Exchange and Reading Rooms where he was the librarian, on one occasion even persuading Vernon H Vaughan (1838-1878), the Governor of the territory, to perform at a fund-raising concert for the library's benefit. Bentham loved his pipe and glass and, as Lindsey put it, 'occasionally his courtly bearing and Chesterfieldian manners would get a little lopsided and obscure'.

Although Bentham lived in America for much of his life, it was not until 12 January 1872 that he became a naturalised citizen of the United States.

In February 1874, Bentham published *Statistics concerning the Territory of Utah for the years 1872-3*.[18] A further business venture was noted in January 1875 by The Daily Independent, a newspaper published at Helena, Montana, which reported that a new monthly journal named Utah Mining Record was shortly to be launched in Salt Lake City. Readers were assured that 'Mr. Bentham Fabian will be at the wheel, and says that the paper will steer clear of party and creed and devote its columns exclusively to the mining interests of the Territory'.

Bentham Fabian died at the Great Western Hotel, Salt Lake City at sunrise on 23 July 1876. The death notice printed three days later in the Salt Lake Herald extended his name to 'Charles Montague Jeremy Betham Fabian' and mentioned:

> *His disease was pneumonia and inflammation of the bowels. He died without a struggle, like an infant falling asleep, apparently without any pain, and surrounded by the four or five faithful friends, who had ministered to his necessities in his closing hours. He was born and passed his early life in Kent, England. He was 59 years old on the 16th instant. Reqiescat in pace.*[19]

He was buried at Plat I, block 11, lot 12 in the 'Strangers W Tier' of Salt Lake City cemetery.[20]

The death and funeral were also recorded in a lengthier account, which was published on the same page of the same issue - see Appendix A. Both the press report and Bentham's burial record state that he had been born on 16 July 1817, which is precisely three years too early. Presumably at some point he had felt it advantageous to inflate his age.

By the 1881 census, Bentham's widow had returned to England and was living at 1a Honduras Street, Finsbury with her married daughter Esther W Turner, her son-in-law and four grandchildren.

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[17] *The Mormons & The Theatre* by John S Lindsay, Salt Lake City, 1905, pages 96-98.
https://archive.org/details/mormonstheatreor00lindrich/page/96/mode/2up

[18] *Statistics concerning the Territory of Utah for the years 1872-3* by Bentham Fabian, Salt Lake City, 1874.
https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=5klOAAAAYAAJ&rdid=book-5klOAAAAYAAJ&rdot=1

[19] https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=11694656

[20] *Salt Lake county death register*, page 187, number A7446.
https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HY-D1F9-V5G?view=index&personArk=%2Fark%3A%2F61903%2F1%3A1%3ANQHG-RYL&action=view&lang=en

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Appendix A: Tribute to Bentham Fabian as published by Salt Lake Herald[21]

Death of Bentham Fabian

It is with a degree of grief that we chronicle the death of Bentham Fabian, a sad event which occurred on Sunday morning at the gentleman's rooms in the Great Western Hotel. For a number of years Mr Fabian has resided in this city, where he had many friends, and we know of no one who was his enemy. He had been missed on the streets for the last few days, and people were beginning to enquire for him, when the news of his death and burial is the answer given. A few warm personal friends were aware of his illness, and they remained with him to the last. Mr. Fabian was ever known here as a cultivated, agreeable gentleman, whose later years were beset with misfortune. He was of English birth, and had occupied positions of honor and trust under his native government. Coming to America many years ago, he embarked in newspaper enterprises, as proprietor and editor, and as many others engaged in the profession have done, experienced successes and reverses and finally died poor. Several Salt Lake papers have had the benefit, at times, of his services, and among the profession here he was a universal favorite. We mourn the death of poor Bentham, and cannot better close this notice than with the words of a kind friend who was with him in his last hours.

IN MEMORIAM

It was a sad burial in the dreary, desolate cemetery on the bench last Sabbath. Weeping clouds overshadowed the group of friends who looked down into the grave of Bentham Fabian and listened to the solemn burial service of the Episcopal church, while the hollow echoes of the falling earth upon the coffin of the gray-haired tenant, repeated the oft-told tale of shattered hopes, of a struggling, weary life and a sad and lonely ending at that open grave. No relative nor friend of his early days stood by the dying man's bedside as wandering memory went back to the beautiful English home of his early manhood, to the wife of his youth and the children of his love. But kind friends of later and more shadowed years ministered in his wants and with sad hearts and heartfelt regrets tenderly bore him to his last home.

"After life's fitful fever he sleeps well," and while the mass of our townfolk who for the last six years have met his tall form and expressive face almost daily upon our thoroughfares will but note his absence and forget him, his more intimate friends will long cherish his memory for the many good qualities he possessed and recur with saddened pleasure to the hours of enjoyment which, in his happiest moments, his fine conversational powers, his extensive knowledge of men and things generally, made him most excellent and entertaining company. Whatever the weakness of his life may have been Bentham Fabian never forgot the courteous bearing of an English gentlemen under any circumstances.

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[21] *Salt Lake Herald*, 26 July 1876, page 3, column 5.
https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=11694656